

WASHINGTON (January 23) - Today, Congresswoman Terri A. Sewell (AL-07) and Congressman Spencer Bachus (AL-06) introduced H.R. 360 to request the United States Congress to bestow its highest civilian honor—the Congressional Gold Medal—to Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Denise McNair who tragically lost their lives during the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963. The purpose of this congressional effort is to recognize during this year of 50<sup>th</sup> commemoration, the significant role the City of Birmingham played in the Civil Rights Movement which changed this nation and impacted the world.

“I am honored to introduce this legislation with my colleague Congressman Spencer Bachus today. While there are many individuals and events rightfully worthy of recognition for the sacrifices made to the Civil Rights Movement, the selection of those who lost their lives in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was the most symbolic event associated with the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham. The four little girls are emblematic of so many who have lost their lives for the cause of freedom: Medgar Evers, Emmett Till, Jimmie Lee Jackson, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner as well as Virgil Ware and James Johnny Robinson who were killed within hours of the church bombing. Over the course of this year 2013, as we commemorate Birmingham’s role in history, we must make every effort to remember and recognize not just these four little girls but all those who have suffered and sacrificed so that Birmingham, Alabama and this nation could uphold its ideals of equality and justice for all,” said Rep. Sewell.

Congressman Bachus added, “It is important to reflect, especially for each new generation, how an act of evil that killed four innocent young girls at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church jarred the conscience of the American people and led to permanent change in our society. The presentation of a Congressional Gold Medal would be a fitting commemoration of the significance of their lives and, from the vantage point we have 50 years later, of the welcome progress on racial equality that has occurred in Birmingham and our nation as a whole. Despite the violence done against them, the belief of the civil rights movement in nonviolent change helped us to avoid the calamities and endless replaying of bitter grievances across generations that has destroyed the fabric of other societies and countries.”

The entire Alabama delegation joined as original cosponsors of H.R. 360 as well as Alabama natives Rep. John Lewis (GA-5) and Sanford Bishop (GA-02).□

***To view floor remarks of Congressman Bachus and Congresswoman Sewell, [click here.](#)***

To view the legislation, [click here](#).

### **History of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing**

*On September 15, 1963, amid high racial tensions, a bomb detonated in the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church as children were entering the basement on their way to worship. Addie Mae Collins, Caroline Robinson, and Cynthia Wesley, who were all 14, and Denise McNair, 11, were killed. The explosion injured 22 people and left heavy damage to the church itself. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. travelled to Birmingham to deliver the eulogy for the children and the bombing, which shocked Americans across the nation, became a galvanizing force for the passage of historic civil rights legislation including the Voting Rights Act of 1964.*

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### **History of the Congressional Gold Medal**

*The presentation of a Congressional Gold Medal requires the support of a two-thirds majority of the House and Senate and the signature of the President. The requirements for a Congressional Gold Medal are set in statute by the rules of the Financial Services Committee, where Congressman Bachus serves as Chairman Emeritus and Congresswoman Sewell serves as a member, and by the House.*

*Individuals and groups in civil rights history who have been Congressional Gold Medal recipients include Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, Dr. Dorothy Height, Rosa Parks, the Little Rock Nine, Jackie Robinson, the Tuskegee Airmen, and the Montford Point Marines.*